Winter Days With the European Armies

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RUSSIAN INFANTRY REGIMENT RESTING IN A SMALL GALICIAN VILLAGE

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A YOUNG FRENCH GIRL DISTRIBUTING CIGARETTES TO SOLDIERS NEAR FIRING LINE

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BELGIANS STILL FIGHTING. A BELGIAN GUN IN ACTION AGAINST THE GERMANS

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SWISS SOLDIERS IN THE ALPS CARRYING SNOW TO MAKE TRENCHES

Factors to Determine the Outcome of European War

Special Correspondence of The Star.

LONDON, February 4, 1915.

I HAVE just had most interesting talks with several of the men who really matter in England. If I were free to name them every American reader would immediately recognize them as men who, in the past and the present, have had an enormous influence on affairs in this country. We have talked of the war, and their views so closely resemble the considered opinions of that limited section of England which really knows what is happening and apt to happen on the continent that they are worth repeating to you.

In the first place, it is the opinion of these men that it is and probably will be impossible to drive the German army out of the trenches where it is so firmly established. There is much talk of the new Kitchener army and the effect it will have upon the war, but all the information obtainable from Germany through neutral and even pro-British sources agree, that Germany is raising an equal, if not greater, number of fresh troops for the spring campaign.

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It is believed here that the new British army will be composed of younger and, therefore, better troops than the new German army, but, even granting that it is, the past few months have proved the enormous advantages possessed by troops fighting on the defensive. As one military authority recently put it, in the trenches a man of forty-five is almost as useful as a man of twenty-one. However, the late spring will see the military forces of the allies at their best, at least in numbers, and should they fail to break the deadlock in France and Belgium that will dispose of the military factor in the war.

Factor No. 2 is the question of starvation. Will the allies be able to starve Germany out? The best opinion here answers this question in the negative. Some seem to believe that Germany will have four lean months—May, June, July and August—and will undoubtedly have to husband its resources, but that there is no reasonable doubt of the ability of the country to feed itself until the next harvest. That disposes of factor No. 2.

The third and last factor, and also, from all accounts, considered here the most important of the three, is the economic pressure as applied to munitions of war. Can the allies prevent a sufficient supply of copper, oil, rubber and so forth, to enable her to continue the war, getting into Germany, and has Germany a sufficient supply of these necessities to permit her to continue for many months without outside supplies? To answer the first question without answering the second is not sufficient for the purpose. German preparation and her admirable habit of minute forethought would seem to compel one to the conclusion that she would never have gone to war unless she had assured herself of an adequate stock of these necessities. On the other hand, the fact that she is offering extraordinary prices for copper and rubber would seem to point to the possibility of an exhaustion of stock.

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According to those I have spoken with, the issue of the war depends upon this factor No. 3. As one of the most famous of them believed, it was impossible to bank with any confidence upon factor No. 1 or 2, but he had hopes of factor No. 3, especially as Germany's difficulties were bound to be, in his opinion, increased by the question of being able to finance her foreign purchases. Of course, Germany is sending some goods abroad to such neutral countries as are still open to her—to Holland, Italy, Roumania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland—and these exports serve to offset her foreign purchases, but it must not be forgotten that the balance will be heavily against her, especially if America is able to trade freely with her in non-contrabands.

As a matter of fact, so satisfied was one politician that the third factor was the determining one that he declared to me emphatically: "The result of this war depends upon the United States."

If we admit the soundness of these several views, do they give any hint of the duration of the war? I claim they do. Factor No. 1 will be put to the fullest test next spring and early summer. Suppose that it fails and that the Germans are not driven out of France and Belgium. Factor No. 2 will be put to the test in May, June, July and August. Suppose that it also fails and the Germans are not starved out, but are once more in possession of an ample crop to carry them for a year. From now until the end of next August factor No. 3 will have had a thorough test.

If Germany is able, during practically nine months, to get from outside sources enough supplies to prosecute a successful war, either on the offensive or the defensive, it is pretty good evidence that she could do it indefinitely, so far as the question of supply is concerned. Thus, by September 1, all three factors will have been tested. If Germany fails in any one she is beaten. If she holds out against all three it is difficult to see how it would be to the advantage of any of the belligerent countries to protract a war in the absence of any reasonable hope of a decisive conclusion.

It is for these reasons that I believe the war will be concluded by or before the 1st of September.

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Grim details, indeed, of the fighting in northern France were given by an English officer home from the front on a few days' leave, to whom I was introduced by a well known Anglo-American novelist at the National Liberal Club last night. This officer speaks French fluently and knows the country well, consequently he has been attached to the French general staff, and the account he gave of the spirits of the defenders of the tricolor was far from roseate.

"The French," he said, "are utterly demoralized, officers and men alike. Their one desire now is to have the war ended. They care little whether they are conquerors or defeated, they just want the war over, and all that saves the situation from the point of view of the allies is that the Germans along the great line are practically in the same condition. Day after day parties of them hold up their hands in token of surrender and then come across and ask to be made prisoners. With the object of putting a stop to this the Germans are trying a new game. Several times of late Taubes have flown over our lines and dropped printed handbills, stating that the Germans had decided to take no more prisoners; that all who fall into their hands will be shot.

"We interpret this as an attempt to goad the French into making a similar resolution, with the result that Germans who otherwise would surrender will pause through fear of being put to death. This is the state of things that the combination of such war horrors as the world has never seen before and some of the worst weather conditions on record has brought about on both sides of the line."

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Then this officer went on to describe the ghastly results of modern shell fire. "When a man is killed by an exploding shell," said he, "there is literally nothing left of him. All that remains is a kind of vapor, which settles down round about. One Sunday morning," he continued, "when we were favored with that rarity, a really glorious day, a fellow-officer and myself, together with eight men of inferior rank, walked from our quarters right up to the main front, a distance of a couple of miles, perhaps. We believed that we should be unobserved by the Germans, but they evidently spotted us and started shell fire. The first shell killed five of the eight men in advance outright, the second blew off both the legs of the man who had been my companion. I ran to him, as he lay, a shocking sight, and as I bent over him he smiled up at me as calmly as if we had been playing tennis.

"'We have had a delightful walk,' he said, and died. That is another strange feature of death through a shell. The victim, apparently, never knows what has happened, his nerves are paralyzed and the dominant thought in his mind is whatever one was there when he was bowled out. This man evidently had been thinking of the pleasures of our walk, hence his tragically ironic remark."

His previous remarks about the feelings of the French and German troops reminded me that one hears on all sides that the last thing that the wounded men now being nursed in England desire is to return to the front. An acquaintance, whose business takes him to every hospital in London and who has talked with scores of wounded men, tells me that he has yet to meet one who yearns for any further war experiences. The story goes, in fact, that when one soldier in a hospital at Ealing was told that he was to return to the front in two days' time he committed suicide by cutting his throat.

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The job of being Lord Kitchener's private secretary, now held by Sir George Arthur, must be no sinecure just now, for, according to all accounts, his daily post bag is an amazing thing. It is largely made up, moreover, of letters of "advice" from members of the public who are utterly unknown to the British war lord (but who have not the slightest hesitation about addressing him personally), and to deal with these "suggestions," which often mount up to three or four hundred letters a day, a special staff has lately come into being at the war office.

This "free advice" comes from every section of the community, and while most of the suggestions put forward are not only entirely unpracticable, but even absurd, perusal of the post bag has to be exhaustive, many really good ideas having already been noted and acted on.

One of the funniest of these letters was addressed to Kitchener by an old lady in Scarborough, whose humanitarian sentiments apparently are such that she could not bring herself to agree to the wholesale extermination of the Germans, which some consider necessary for the good of mankind. Accordingly, she wrote, calling Kitchener's attention to the properties of a certain well known anti-beetle preparation, which, if packed in shells instead of shrapnel, would render the enemy insensible and in our clutches just the same as if they had been killed off." Kitchener's reply, if any, is not available.

In perhaps only one place in all Europe is there no need for the "Nix on the War" cards that I hear are so popular in the United States, for there, so a Swiss friend tells me, the war is never mentioned. This unique spot is the great hospice of the St. Bernard monks, 10,000 feet high, where men of every nationality are to be found, and where a tacit agreement has been come to never to refer to the great struggle. Yet, oddly enough, the monks of St. Bernard may be said to be in close touch with the war, for they come in contact every day with Swiss soldiers guarding the frontiers, and, I am told, are always glad to render any service they can. Now that the heavy winter weather has come along, the monks and novices make their daily rounds on skis, which, by the way, are made in the monastery.

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Although the English newspapers speak as if the intervention of Roumania and Italy on behalf of the allies is a certainty of the near future, such is not by any means the opinion of official circles here.

I was talking with a member of parliament who has been in close semi-official touch with the various Balkan states and although he was sure that Greece would intervene at a convenient moment, he was not at all sure about Roumania and was dead certain that Bulgaria was a hard nut to crack. It is perfectly well known that Bulgaria is very bitter over the second Balkan war and that that bitterness against Roumania, Greece and Serbia is bound to affect her foreign policy. The danger is that if Roumania and Greece enter the larger war, Bulgaria, which is believed to have made a military convention with Turkey, will seize the opportunity of recovering the territory she believes she was robbed of by her erstwhile allies.

It is, according to many observers who allow their wishes to play father to their thoughts, only the danger that Bulgaria will follow such a course that keeps Roumania out of the great struggle. But better informed and less biased critics remember that for years Roumania has been very close to Vienna and Berlin, and, what is perhaps more important still, she is known to have a military convention with Austria.

Some of these profess to believe that the obvious national interests of Roumania will rise superior to any consideration of documents signed by the late pro-German ruler of Roumania; but even many of these do not go beyond declaring that Roumania will confine any action she might take to a military occupation of Transylvania and that such action might be aimed at Russia as well as at Austria.

As for Italy, I find no great confidence among the official class here that she will come in, despite the tone of the newspapers. It is realized that however much she might like to regain Trentino and Trieste, the triple alliance, although it did not compel her to come in with Germany and Austria, would compel, in honor, at least, a firm neutrality. At any rate, it is apparent to all that Great Britain is not acting toward Italy in the matter of imports at all as if she were confident that the official sympathy of the Mediterranean power with the allies was beyond question.

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By way of Terschelling, the Friesland Island off the Dutch coast, came those Zeppelins that dropped bombs on Yarmouth the other night. In the minds of some of us who write for the press the names of Yarmouth and Terschelling have been associated before, as a result of having visited the Dutch island to look into the fate of a ship that sailed from the town where the bloaters also come from; I mean the historic Lutine, the old frigate wrecked in 1799 on the Dutch coast, a few hours after she sailed from Yarmouth.

To this day the Lutine's bones rest in the shifting sands off Terschelling and coffin just about $7,000,000 in gold bars. The gold was intended originally for warfare. It was consigned to Kamburg, to pay the troops then fighting against Napoleon in parts of what is now the German empire.

Terschelling itself is a curious island, a great waste of sand dunes, some of them a couple of hundred feet high. One goes to it by a little steamboat that plies once a day across the Zuyder Zee from the Dutch port of Harlingen. The men of the island and its neighborhood, Vlieland, are famous seamen. Brave and hardy, the record of their deeds in the Terschelling lifeboat are as striking as any in the annals of heroism.

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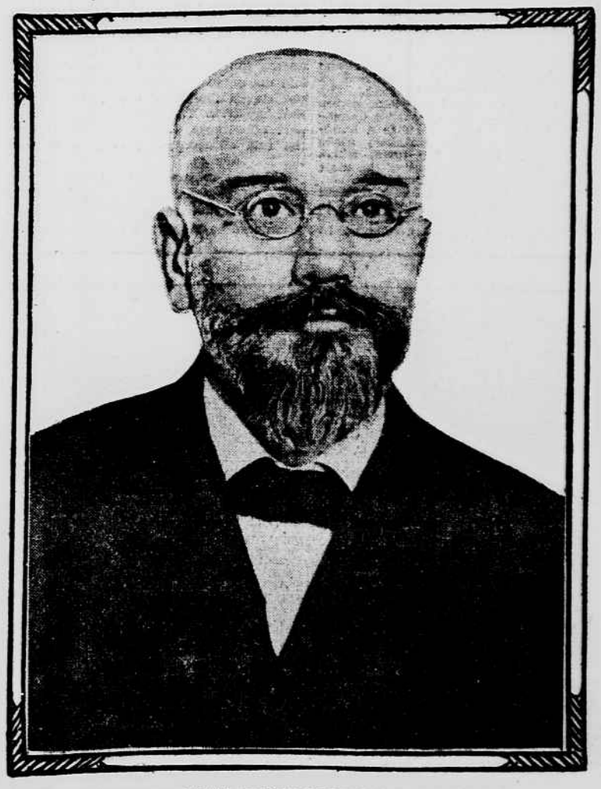
Those wonderful Germans! What will they think of next! It is not long since one saw it stated, apparently quite seriously, that the Teutons were considering the expedient of utilizing the well known "homing" instinct of bees for the purpose of making dispatch carriers of these insects—the messages to be imprinted in some fashion on their wings—and now, it is said, they purpose to train birds as aeroplane detectors!

A friend in Amsterdam sends me a clipping from the Berlin Morgenpost, in which this idea is elaborated. The writer declares that birds, with their uncanny sense of the presence of danger long before it is visible, should be used to aid soldiers in detecting the approach of hostile aeroplanes long before human ears or even eyes, aided by field glasses, can be aware of their coming.

The birds selected are pigeons and fowls, and the scheme is as follows: They are to be taken daily to a place suitable for an aeroplane to land, and then a machine arriving from the upper air is to descend there. Each time an aeroplane comes down the birds are to be lightly thrashed with a small birch until, by the association of ideas, the approach of an aeroplane regularly awakens in them feelings of terror. Then they are to be taken to the front, when it is believed they will give unmistakable signs of fear whenever an aeroplane comes anywhere near the neighborhood long before the soldiers themselves have any idea that an enemy is in the air.

E. L. HEITKAMP.

PRIVY CONCILOR RUDOLF HAVERSTEIN,
President of the German reichsbank, who has played an all-important part in saving the fatherland from a financial collapse.



ELEUTHENOS VENEZELOS,
Prime minister of Greece, who is anxious to take a hand in the great war, chiefly against Turkey.